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CIA's Helms Keeps Mum at Hearing

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WASHINGTON — After 26 years with the CIA, Richard Helms is the nation's preeminent, most experienced spy.

And Monday he lived by the code of the spy to the bitter end.

Eased out, without explanation, after 6½ years as head of the CIA, Helms had the first opportunity of his career to tell all at a public hearing. But in the grand tradition of the CIA, he chose to keep his mouth shut.

HELMS has been banished by the Nixon Administration to the U.S. ambassadorship in Iran — apparently to give the job to a Nixon loyalist.

He told Sen. J. William Fulbright (D., Ark.), chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, that he didn't intend to start talking now.

"I think if I should talk it would be a bad example for those still in the agency," he said.

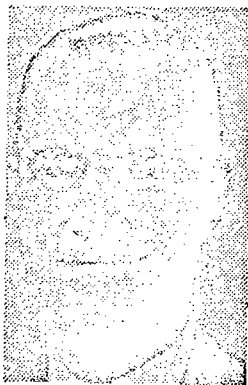
But he did go as far as to say that none of his boys had any part in the Watergate affair — that, he said, involved some ex-CIA agents, with no remaining connections.

"I had no control over anyone who left," he said.

Two former CIA agents participated in the celebrated Watergate raid on Democratic National Committee headquarters in Washington, E. Howard Hunt Jr. and James McCord Jr.

Helms also said that the CIA had not cooperated with International Telephone and Telegraph Corp. (ITT) for "espionage purposes" in Chile — as suggested last year by the so-called "Anderson papers."

IN FACT, he said the CIA had the same kinds of relations with many corporations overseas as it had with ITT



Richard Helms

...headed for Iran

in Chile — and he wouldn't describe those relations as "espionage."

He called them relationships for "exchanging information."

The Anderson papers reported regular contacts between ITT and a CIA official in Washington in an apparent attempt to prevent a communist government from taking over in Chile.

But on the whole, Helms had little to say about his activities at the CIA — and nothing at all to say about the reasons for his departure.

And the often-acerbic senators of the Foreign Relations committee, who have often delighted in the past needling the Nixon Administration, treated Helms with kid gloves.

HIS APPOINTMENT to the Iranian ambassadorship, far from the seats of power he has occupied for so long, was greeted, by and large, as though it were a promotion.

The session was, in fact, the first time that Helms has ever testified in public before a congressional committee. He has often briefed senators behind closed doors.

Fulbright chided Helms a bit about the Iranian appointment. "I have a feeling," he said, "you know more about the CIA than Iran — is that a fair statement?"

Helms seemed amused. "Mr. Chairman," he replied, "you know as much about Iran as I do."

Senators of both parties praised Helms for doing an "objective" job in preparing reports.

The unanswered, and unasked, question at the hearing was why, if Helms had done so well, he had been demoted. Some administration officials, at least, believe that the White House has been unhappy with Helms' independence at the CIA.

SOME BELIEVE that the administration would like reports more in keeping — or supportive — of its policies.

No senator asked Helms about that, but reporters cornered him in a hallway after the hearing and popped the question.

"That," he said, "is cocktail party chatter."

"The CIA has established a tradition of fair and honest reporting. And presidents know that and all presidents appreciate the need for that."

But is he concerned that the tradition might now be imperiled?

"I don't know," he said. "We'll have to wait and see."

Helms' successor at the CIA, James Schlesinger, was a budget expert at the White House before he was appointed head of the Atomic Energy Commission last year.

He was scheduled to testify at an open hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee two weeks ago but at the last minute plans were changed. The open hearing was canceled. Schlesinger testified behind closed doors.